

The Ballarat Naturalist

December 2014



History of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens

Lorraine Powell from the Friends of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens spoke to the November meeting on the topic “History of the Ballarat Botanic Gardens”. Lorraine has been involved for over two decades with the garden-friends’ group and contributed to a book on the history of the gardens so she had a wealth of knowledge and information to share. Lorraine was obviously proud of the gardens with its unique row of busts of every Prime Minister of Australia, Thomas Stoddart statues and stately trees.



Photo: Gardens & Lake

This was the site of the police paddock which was moved to where the golf course was. A prize of ten pounds was offered for the design of the gardens. George Longley was chosen as the inaugural curator. He was paid £3 per week and spent his first 18 months living in a tent before a house was built.

In 1856 a decision was made to establish gardens. The gold rush town of the time was either muddy or dusty and a gardens for everyone was the vision. The site of 100 acres (40 hectare) west of the then named, Yuille Swamp was finally chosen. Some points of interest in the talk were the depositing of night soil on the site, plans for a palm house and the melting down of the garden gates by a Sebastopol foundry during World War 1 to assist the war effort. Prisoners helped with the work, laying out paths, etc. In 1890, Gilfoyle contributed to the design of the gardens.

Early features of the gardens were a maze initially of Prickly Moses and later of Boxthorn that some may still remember, as they may also, remember the zoo which was established with a bequest of ten thousand pounds. Plants from many countries were established. In 1863 White Swans were introduced and survived until the 1960s.

There have been three conservatories in the gardens. The one referred to as the Keel House was built in 1908. It was replaced in the 1950s by the Cuthbert conservatory and later by the current Robert Clark conservatory.

In the 1930s the north gatehouse was removed to 1414 Gregory Street opposite Colpin Avenue and was recently made available to the friends' group but would cost \$33,000 to \$45,000 to move.

Lorraine's presentation was interesting and illustrated by slides of information and photos. She provided much more information than contained in this brief report. Thank you Lorraine for your fascinating introduction about the early days of such an important and pleasant part of Ballarat.

Peter Dalman

New Pea at Canadian

Last spring, while setting up photo-point monitoring sites in Canadian Forest, I noticed an unusual pea in a patch of remnant bush. It looked like a flat-pea but not Common Flat-pea *Platylobium obtusangulum* - leaves were smaller and rounded. Research showed it was similar to Victorian Flat-pea *Platylobium alternifera* found in the Grampians.



Photo: Penny-leaf Flat-pea.

In Oct. 2014 I revisited the site and collected a flowering specimen which I photographed and pressed. Still not sure of the correct identification. Roger Thomas found an article from *Muelleria* (a Victorian plant classification scientific journal) on the web about a revision of the genus *Platylobium*. The author of the article, Ian Thompson, had described several new species of *Platylobium*. I emailed photos of the Canadian plant to Ian and received a reply saying that the plant was *Platylobium rotundum* which has been given the common name Penny-leaf Flat-pea.

The prostrate plants were growing in a 20 m by 15 m area of Canadian Forest. The plants produce roots from nodes. Leaves are alternate along the stem. The flowers are mainly yellow with red markings, occurring 1 or 2 per axil on a pedicel 20-50 mm long. The calyx has sparse hairs. Few flowers produce seed. Occurs in open forest of central and central-west Victoria from Mt Buangor east to Blackwood.

Australian Naturalists' Network, FNCB Hobart reports

Mt Wellington by Val Hocking

On our only cloudy damp day, we ascended Mt Wellington and my bus stopped at *The Springs* car park where we had a delightful walk to the Spinx Rocks passing bushes of red berries of the Pink Mountain Berry *Leptecophyla juniparina* and pink and purple berries of the spreading Cheeseberry *Cyathodes straminea* . There was also lots of



Photo: Cheeseberry

white daisy bush and flowering cream Mountain Needlebushes *Hakea lissosperma*. Many rocks were covered in white and shades of green and grey lichens, adding more beauty in the misty day. Later we drove to the top of the mountain and had to be content to accept the lovely views of Hobart's waterways from a picture.

Our final talk on Sun night was based around Jelly fish and how large numbers can be a sign of overfishing and other environmental destruction. Words of thanks from West Australia Field Nats summed up our great week together and they invited us to Perth in Aug/Sept 2016

Styx Valley by John Gregurke

The Styx Valley Big Tree Reserve is near Maydena 100km north-west of Hobart. The reserve is adjacent to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Site. The area of wet eucalypt forest has been reserved to protect the world's tallest flowering plants *Eucalyptus regnans*. A boardwalk has been constructed through the forest. Little light penetrates to ground level which is carpeted by mosses, lichens and Soft Tree Fern *Dicksonia antarctica*.



Photo:Styx River and Myrtle Beech, Blackwood, Tree Fern.

The middle layer trees include Southern Sassafras *Atherosperma moschatum* and Myrtle Beech *Nothofagus cunninghamii*. Towering above are Mountain Ash *Eucalyptus regnans* believed to be 400 years old and growing to a height of nearly 90 metres. Lunch was extended because of a flat, front tyre on the bus. We had extra time

in bright sunshine on the banks of Styx River. The vegetation along the river is rainforest dominated by Myrtle Beech. Myrtle Orange Fungus *Cyttaria gunni* grows only on Myrtle Beech and is a traditional Aboriginal food. The endemic Tasmanian Thornbill was seen near the river.



Photo: Myrtle Orange Fungus

Tasmanian Bushland Garden by John Gregurke

The Tasmanian Bushland Garden has been developed adjacent to the Tasman Highway near Buckland approximately 50 km north-east of Hobart. The 22 ha timbered dolerite hill had been degraded by grazing, firewood collection and a quarry when purchased in 2000. Over the next 10 years it was developed into a regional botanic garden to show case the native flora of south-east Tasmania. The garden opened to the public in 2010.



Photo: SE Tas species planted on scree slope in former quarry.

The Display Gardens occupy about half a hectare, and have been developed on a gentle sunny slope facing SW. Display beds have been planted to simulate natural plant communities growing on dolerite in the south-east, with some of the rare and plants of eastern Tasmania. The landscaping features many local rocks and logs, which give a natural setting, and the gardens merge into the surrounding grassy woodland.

The quarry site has been transformed into a safe area with local flora planted in a carefully de-



Photo: Grassy Dolerite Heath community with Tussock Grasses *Poa sp.* and Guinea flowers *Hibbertia sp.*

signed scree slope, and placements of sculptures of Wedge-tailed Eagle, Tasmanian Tiger and dinosaur, and construction of a waterfall and vegetated pond.

The leaders for this ANN excursion were Keith and Sib Corbett who were involved with the development of the garden. They gave us an excellent account of the transformation of the degraded area into beautiful area which informs the public and encourages the uses of the local flora in gardens.

November Excursion - A Step Back in time

The November excursion was changed to the Wombat Forest area in



Photo: Deep railway cutting near Wombat Station

the hope of seeing more flowers as reports were that Mt Beckworth was too dry. The first stop was at the site of Wombat Station (Rocklyn), where there was once a thriving gold mining town. We parked on the site of the platform. All that is present now is a rotunda built by the Great Dividing Trail Association (GDTA) and a track that follows the rail line. One of the attractions is a deep rail cutting.

Before we set off to explore the cutting we crossed the Dean-Barkstead Road for a brief foray to see Beard and Bird Orchids, Milkmaids, Trigger Plants, a few different pea flowering plants and many patches of the Creeping Grevillea, *Grevillea repens*.

After morning tea we began the walk down the old rail line. The first section of the walk is built up with the material from the cutting and gives an elevated view through the forest. It leads onto the cutting with its 20metre high walls. It was an opportunity to marvel at the amount of rock and material that would have had to be moved with only basic equipment.

There were a few members who had not been to this site before but others remember Les leading a fungi excursion a few years ago. One of the botanical features is that there are about 5 different types of ferns present and a few healthy populations of Bush Club Moss. There were lots of flowers and a few birds to see as we made our way to the end of the cutting stopping to read the sign erected to mark the opening of the trail by the GDTA.



Photo: Sailors Falls

At the end of the cutting there is an intact red brick culvert and a few members scrambled down to see it.

We returned via a track that runs parallel to the cutting on the north side and observed a few different plants. To the disappointment of a few, when we returned to the vehicles it was not time for lunch as that was planned for the picnic area at Sailor's falls where there are a few more amenities.

The shelter, toilet, mineral spring pump and interpretive signage have had a facelift in recent years so is a great place to stop off. Fortified by lunch we headed down the several flights of steep steps to look at the falls. There was a small amount of water still flowing. One could venture further on from the falls and complete the walking trail. The number of cars in the car park indicated that walkers had, but we had another site to visit.

We headed back towards Spargo Creek and went into the Spargo Creek Reserve. It hadn't been planned as a tour of mineral springs but there is one here as well which is of the sodium bicarbonate type.



Photo : Club members at Spargo mineral springs

We walked through the reserve noting a few similar plants to the Wombat Station site but we also observed a few more birds one being a spotted pardalote that was seen coming out of a hole in an embankment.

According to the signage this reserve was a popular picnic area.

After the Korweinguboorra Reservoir was built south of the reserve

in 1909 the Geelong Water Board tried to discourage development of the reserve but the Shire of Bungaree however continued to add to and improve the reserve. Fran could remember attending events there.

Some members headed home from the reserve and a few of us continued on, stopping off at Moorabool Reservoir to observe the birds.

Elspeth Swan



Christmas Get-together

Bill Murphy has invited us to have our FNCB Christmas party
at *Rosebank*, Community Room, 19a Charlotte St. in Sebastopol
the evening of Wed. 10th Dec

Bring something for the bbq and a dessert or salad.

Lilwarre & Rokewood Cemetery Excursion, 18 Nov.

We gathered at Lilwarre and were met by Emily and Peter. Many plants were finished flowering because of the early spring. Several Small Grass-tree *Xanthorrhoea minor* were flowering without the stimulation of fire. A variety of yellow flowers were scattered – Trailing Goodenia *Goodenia lanata*, Upright Guinea-flower *Hibbertia riparia*, Tiger Orchid *Diuris sulphurea*, Wattle Mat-rush *Lomandra filiformis* and the lemon-coloured flowers of Common Wedge-pea *Gompholobium huegii*.

We had a close look at a bunch of red flowers under a Scentbark which had fallen from Drooping Mistletoe *Amyema pendula*. Chocolate Lily *Arthropogon strictum* had a few flowers remaining and Blue Pin-cushion *Brunonia australis* was seen with the usual blue and some mauve-coloured flowers. Other orchids seen were Common and Slender Onion Orchid *Microtis unifolia* and *M. parviflora*, Purple Beard Orchid *Calochilus robertsonii*, Flying Duck Orchid *Caleana major*, and stem of Hyacinth Orchid *Dipodium* sp. emerging through the hard-packed soil along a track.

Several small plants were seen and identified. Blue Bottle-daisy *Lagenophora stipata*, Small Bottle-daisy *Solengyne dominii* (which had small dark seeds), Hairy Stylewort *Levenhookia dubia* (tiny 4-

petalled flowers), Brooklime *Gratiola pubescens* (a herb with white flowers) and Centella *C. cordifolia* (a creeping plant with heart-shaped leaves).



Photo: *Pardolote with nesting material*
C Hall

Galahs were using a hollow Scentbark and a pair of Kookaburras stayed close to the hollow at the top a broken Scentbark trunk. The bird sighting which created the most interest was a pair of Spotted Pardolotes carrying stringbark nesting material into a burrow in a pile of soil within 4 metres of Emily and Peter's kitchen window. Carol took some good shots.

In the afternoon we travelled to Rokewood. Between Berringa and Dereel we stopped at a dry hillside and Emily showed us Common Rustyhood *Pterostylis squamata*. At the Rokewood Cemetery the well managed grasslands had a colourful display of Button Wrinklewort *Rutidosia leptorhynchos*, Common Everlasting *Chrysocephalum apiculatum*, Hoary Sunray *Leucochrysum albicans* var. *tricolor*, Pink Bindweed *Convolvulus erubescens*, Feather-heads *Ptilotus macrocephalus* and Blue Devil *Eryngium ovinum*. Less welcome was the South African Orchid *Disa bracteata* which is proving difficult to control.

Thanks to Emily and Peter for welcoming another group of Field Nats and identifying many of the plants during a rewarding day.

John Gregurke

Western Treatment Plant Excursion

FNCB excursion on Sunday 8 Feb. 2015 is to the Western Treatment Plant at Werribee. The sewage ponds attract a large range of migratory waders, ducks and other water birds during summer.

We need to notify Melbourne Water before the excursion, of the people and cars that will be going. Each car must have a permit holder.

Please notify John Gregurke, at the December meeting, if you wish to attend, have a current permit or are willing to take your car.

Show and Tell Reports at Nov. Meeting

A black and white photograph of a muskrat perched on a branch over water, eating a nut. The muskrat is facing right, holding a nut in its mouth. Its fur is dark and textured. The background shows ripples on the water surface.

Claire and Peter Dalman saw a pair of Orange-bellied Parrots fly up from the ground at the Tarkine, Tasmania.

Chris Baulch got a great view of a female Tawny Frogmouth and its chick nestling in their nest on a dead tree at Mt Martha, and then spotted the male sitting in a nearby tree.

Val Hocking saw more than 12 Bar-tailed Godwits feeding at the shore edge at Marion Bay, Tasmania, having migrated from above the Arctic Circle.

Margaret Thomas has had ravens nesting in her front garden and got to watch the chick being fed by its parent perched atop a garden tripod.

John Gregurke showed us the Euca-flip he purchased in Tasmania. It looked like a wonderful, detailed, pictorial guide to all Eucalypts indigenous to Tasmania.

Emily Noble reported the return of Sacred Kingfishers to the wetland on her block, the Australasian Grebe chicks most enjoying their meals of yabbies, and the apparent parasitising of Cup Moth Caterpillars by an unknown insect: a wasp perhaps?

Excursion Sunday afternoon, Dec 7

Excursion led by Paul N and Bill M to the Enfield State Forest/Park.

The **afternoon** excursion will leave from the usual carpark at 1.30 pm

A picnic tea at a spot; TBA at Friday's meeting ,will finish the day.

Excerpts from Club Meeting Minutes Nov 7, 2014

Attendance: 26 members were warmly welcomed by President Peter Dalman. **Apologies:** Nina Netherway, Zelda Martin, Jacki Metcalf, Denis & Elizabeth Thurgood, Genny Binns, Douglas Menin.

Correspondence: IN:

From VNPA: E-bulletin, Oct. 2014: letter detailing various regressions in Victoria's environmental policies and the deleterious effects they are having on the State's national parks and conservation areas. From RSPCA Victoria: Email thanking our Club for adding its name to an "*Agreed Statement*" in support of a ban on recreational shooting of native waterbirds in Victoria. They provided a copy of the letter to the Minister, the *Agreed Statement* and the 53 signatory organisations.

From Geoff Howard, MP: Letter declaring that Labor will establish the Canadian State Park in Ballarat if elected, and requesting that a representative of our Club participate in the organising committee.

Business Arising from Correspondence:

Three requests for donations were considered by members: including Trust for Nature's appeal for funds to purchase another 160 Ha at Long Swamp, the largest wetland on the Moolort Plains near Maryborough. This purchase will enable restoration of the natural hydrology, returning the swamp to a deep freshwater marsh and allowing an abundance of aquatic plants and aquatic life to again prosper, substantially increasing its habitat value for bird species and Growling Grass Frog. Members agreed that a donation of \$500

The Club's members agreed to formally accept grant funding for the full amount requested (\$10,950.50 inc. GST) from DEPI for improvements to interpretive material for the La Gerche Forest Trail, with all necessary paperwork and before-photos to be submitted by 21st November.

Claire Dalman moved that "*A Forester's Log*", a book about John La Gerche and his achievements, should be purchased by the Club

Reports: Treasurer's Report: Opening balance \$6,244.16

Income \$304.90 Expenses \$190.20 Closing balance: \$6358.06

BREAZE "*Ballarat and Australia's Changing Climate*" event. Several field nat's were amongst the 94 attendees presented with a technical array of maps and graphs showing very worrying long-term climate trends. A 17 year-old from Ballarat Grammar presented per-

sonal concerns and hopes with regard to the climate and possible actions to counter current trends.

DEPI workshop on “Planned Burning Reform” in Creswick with 30 environmental volunteers and various experts in aspects of fire behaviour, modelling, response, ecology, etc. primarily from across the Grampians Region of the West Central Bushfire Risk Landscape, highlighted ongoing concerns in the environmental community about the place biodiversity values were apparently relegated to in the planned burn prioritisation process.

DEPI *Meet and Greet* with new Regional Managers of key departments involved in the West Central Bushfire Risk Landscape Plan: Fire & Land, Innovation and Engagement, Environment and Natural Resources. Very worthwhile meeting where representatives from the Field Nat’s, Birdlife Ballarat, Ballarat Environment Network and Wombat Forestcare were given the chance to present our key concerns and hopes with regard to biodiversity values in the face of current planned burning regimes, and advocate the involvement in burn planning of local stakeholders possessing detailed site knowledge.

General Business

Syllabus item ideas for next year. Several ideas were put forward by members: A family fun day to involve young field nat’s; Leon Costermans discussing geology and its effects on the distribution of plants, animals and vegetation classes; a paleo-ecologist or botanist like (Peter?) Kershaw from Monash Uni., Wildflowers of WA by Neil Macumber, Securing Woodland Birds Project- Tanya Loos, Understanding the Natural Soundscape - Andrew Skeoch, Riparian woodland bird breeding project - Birgita Hansen.

Field trip ideas for next year: working bee(s) at La Gerche Forest Trail, Creswick, Sea Shepherd ship tour at Williamstown, Mt Beckworth, Anglesea, Lilwarre, Clarksdale Bird Sanctuary, Linton Block, Dereel for winter-flowering orchids, Canadian Multi-use Forest Park, Wala Animal Sanctuary.

Peter Dalman asked all members to actively consider options for both syllabus items and field trips over the next month and come to the next meeting brimming with ideas.

SEANA Autumn Camp preparations. Peter and Claire asked all members to consider how they could be involved, whether as field trip leaders, researchers, organising team members, etc., and come to the next meeting with field trip ideas.

CALENDAR 2014-15

December

- Fri 5 *From the Birdbath*—Jenny Sedgwick, Ballarat Birdlife
 Sun 7 PM Exc *Enfield area*: - Bill Murphy & Paul Norquay (See P9)
 Wed 10 Christmas gathering - (See P 7)

January

- Tues 27 Committee meeting, 5pm

February

- Fri 6 *Cape York* - John Gregurke
 Outback Queensland - Claire & Peter Dalaman
 Sun 8 *Western Treatment Plant*, Werribee -Permit holders (See P 8)
-

Committee

President	Peter Dalman
Vice –Pres	Fran Hanrahan
Secretary	Emily Noble
Treasurer	Les Hanrahan

Claire Dalman
 John Gregurke
 Wayne McGuire

Val Hocking
 John Mildren

Correspondence: PO Box 328W, Ballarat West, 3350

Email:Secretary:- Emily Noble

Editor: Fran Hanrahan

Website: <http://fieldnatballarat.wordpress.com>

Club email: ballaratfnc@gmail.com

Meetings are held at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr and Gregory Sts, on the first Friday of the month at 7.30pm..

Excursions: Leave from the carpark at the Primary Industries Training Centre, cnr Gillies and Gregory Sts. at 9.30 am, unless otherwise advised.

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